

# ACROSS THE CORRIDOR

Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

Phil Daring and Bob Stevens, two cousins, are accused of the murder of their rich uncle, who, on the night of the crime, was about to change his will in favor of Phil. Bob having proved unworthy, Bradshaw manages to throw suspicion on Phil, who after a trial is sentenced to State's prison for thirty years. His cellmate there is Bradshaw, a former coachman of the dead uncle, now serving a term of ten years, having been convicted of stealing on the testimony of Phil. Bradshaw hates the new convict and the two soon come to blows. Phil is awakened at night by the sound of the filing of steel, coming from Bradshaw's bunk, and the next day, on inspection of the cell, the file is found in Phil's mattress. He is taken before the captain, but his innocence is not believed in, and he is placed in solitary confinement in a darkened cell, in which Bradshaw is presently striking. Phil is caught in the act of striking his cellmate and is sentenced to thirty lashes at the whipping post. He rebels, strikes a guard a terrific blow and knocks the other attendant unconscious. For this he receives the badge of shame—red stripes, marking him as a convict among convicts. He receives letters from his sweetheart, Alice Arlington, saying that her family is forcing her to marry Bob, though she knows her heart is Phil's. Phil becomes desperate and decides to listen to the plan of another convict he believes is scheming to escape.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

**A CHANCE.**  
Phil returned to his cell with the pall in which the little convict, whose number he had found to be 9999, had slipped the bar of hard prison soap.

Bradshaw was still in his bunk and did not move when Daring entered and began scrubbing the floor, on hands and knees, his back to the door.

When Phil took out the soap he found on one side of it there were deep scratches, as though they had been made by a nail.

Placing that side of the soap up he rubbed the smooth side on the floor and looked carefully at the scratches while he worked.

It was easy for him to make them out through his fingers, and no one would imagine what he was doing.

Phil made out that the scratches were printed letters that formed words. In an instant he realized that this means of communication had come to be adopted.

Soap was one article about which the prison authorities were very lenient. A man was obliged to return the pail each morning, but the soap was often retained and used in many ways.

The men groined the cracks in their shoes with it, pasted up pictures in their cells, using the soap for glue, and made it useful in a dozen different ways.

For these reasons the cakes of soap were not watched, and one could be found in almost any cell. Then Phil understood that No. 9999 had been trying to give him this message for several days. He was sorry that he had not accepted before.

It took him more than usual to scrub the cell that morning. When he had finished, the message, scratched into the bar of soap, was firmly imprinted on his mind.

He repeated it many times to himself, so that he would remember every word of it.

The message had read:  
13th. From supper,  
Ladder N. E. cor.  
No. picket. Dark.  
Further news.

That was all, and yet No. 8881, his wits sharpened by the close confinement, understood perfectly that it was a plan for escape.

In his marches through the yard he, too, had noticed that convicts were building a building in the northeast corner, near the wall, and that they left their ladders standing by the buildings ever night. Phil had calculated the height of them and found that they reached within four or five feet from the top of the wall.

He was certain that he understood the message correctly. The "13th" evidently stood for the date of the escape, and that was only two days away.

Phil planned the whole thing out in his mind on the evidence found in the message. Evidently the idea was that the convicts in the plot at a prearranged signal would dash for the ladders, carry them a short distance from the buildings to the prison wall, and climb over.

That would be when the line passed that northeast corner, on their return from supper, on the 13th. The further information that the line would be dark and no picket was on duty at that spot was encouraging.

Having thought it all out, Phil was just about to turn the cake of soap over and erase the message by one quick rub on the floor when Bradshaw's voice broke out in a hoarse whisper.

"What are you sleeping on the job for? That soap ain't hypnotized you, has it?"

"No, what are you talking about?" answered Phil quickly, to hide his confusion.

"Well I saw you looking at it lovingly an' I thought maybe it was an old friend of yours, or somethin'." There was a curious note in the voice that bothered Phil.

Turning the bar over quickly he gave two or three hard rubs and obliterated the message.

Bradshaw watched with interest.

## By ROBERT CARLTON BROWN —AUTHOR OF— "THE BURDEN OF PROOF"

look of assent and scarcely moved his lips as he said "yes" in the way that he had seen other prisoners do.

A happy light spread over the little convict's face, and then he fell into line, his features fixed as usual.

As he marched along Phil cast a glance toward the ladders in the northeast corner of the yard. They had to pass within six feet of them; the realization how simple it would be to overpower the two guards that watched their line and run for the ladders.

What the other convicts would do when the attempt was made he did not know. But it would be dark at that time on the appointed night, and there was the last line to file through that part of the yard on the return from supper.

But why had the plotters chosen him for one of their men? Then a horrible thought swept over him. Was it on account of his red stripes?

A man in such garb was considered to be reckless and always looking for a chance to escape. Was it for that reason, or because the prison pickets had orders to shoot the first man in the yard?

The thought thrilled through Phil. For a time he wished that he had not agreed to be one of them. Yet he must get out, and he could run the risk as well as they.

That night Bradshaw watched him closely, but said nothing.

The next morning, that of the 12th, Daring jumped from his bunk at two first tap of the bell. He wanted to be the one to scrub out that day.

Bradshaw started from his bunk at the same time.

"I'm going to clean out this morning," was the ex-coachman's remark.

Phil was surprised at this sudden change in his cell-mate, usually the fellow was glad to lie in his bunk and let Daring do the work. His attitude made Phil suspicious.

"Better get a wash out my week," was Daring's reply.

A queer glow came into Bradshaw's eyes when he saw that the man that the fellow was about to scrub was something caustic. Then a change came over the man. He dropped his eyes and rolled back to his bunk.

"All right, you do it, if you're so blamed fond of work. It's a sort of satisfaction to see you do it, scrubbing in my place, anyway," he said, with a slow smile.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

**THE LAST MESSAGE.**  
Phil Daring started for the pail at once.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw No. 9999 leave his cell at the same time and gauge his steps so that he would reach the washstand in the corner a little before Phil.

Daring noticed that the little convict carried his right arm stiffly, and the moment he reached the place where the pails were kept Phil saw him cautiously remove a bar of soap from his pocket and place it in the bottom of a pail, which he began to fill up with water.

Daring took the cue from Bradshaw. Stepping up beside No. 9999 he took the pail from his hands, at the same time saying:

"Here, that's mine."

No. 9999 looked up with feigned surprise and replied:

"Guess you're right."

"Here, stop that noise!" commanded a guard, stepping up.

The prisoners were silent. Nothing more was said about their slight breach of the rules, for a little license was allowed the men when cleaning up in the morning, and as long as there was no regular quarrel the guards did not object to a little talking before breakfast.

Happy in having worked the scheme so well, Phil returned with the bucket that No. 9999 had prepared for him.

In it floated a cake of hard prison soap. The side that was turned up was smooth and clean. Daring felt that the under side would present quite a different appearance.

He turned in at his cell and dropped to his knees at once, his back to the door, trying to get his body free, such a way as to cut off Bradshaw's view of his hands and the cake of soap.

The moment Phil's fingers touched the bar he felt deep scratches on one side, and knew that they contained another message.

Again he carefully read between his fingers.

The second message was:

"Six of us. One knife. One gun. Help take off guard. Three for ladders. More tomorrow."

Phil understood from that that he was one of the trio designated to overpower the guard, while the others placed the ladders.

It was some satisfaction to know that the plotters had secured a knife and gun to help in the escape. Daring wished that he had some sort of weapon, but, on second thought, he decided that it might get him into trouble.

Having memorized the message, he quickly rubbed it out and then turned to look at Bradshaw.

The ex-coachman was still slipping back to his bunk and his eyes were diverted from Phil's.

"What do you mean," snapped Phil, whirling about abruptly.

At that moment the "pat-pat" of a guard's shoes cut through the clatter of the prisoner's stiff boots as they went up and down the corridor.

Daring turned quickly.

Instead of a guard, the leering face of bath trusty No. 771 appeared at the door.

"Nice conversation you gentlemen are having," was his remark, as his fiery little eyes burned their way into the cell.

Daring was taken aback by the abrupt appearance of the trusty. He had neither seen nor heard of him since the day he had left him insensible on the ground near the whipping-post.

No. 771 still appeared weak from the struggle and the blow he had received the head.

"Didn't expect to see me sneaking around again so soon, did you?" he queried, as he caught Phil's wondering look.

No. 8881 made no reply.

"I want to tell you've got to toe the mark now. I got two or three little grudges at you already and I'm going to see that you get yours," continued 771.

Bradshaw looked quickly at Phil; then, finding that the young fellow's gaze was on the door, he signed in "lip-language" to the bath trusty.

"I hope I'll get a chance soon, too," 771 went on, quickly understanding Bradshaw's sign.

"Well, wait till you do get one," flashed Phil, tiring of the continual flow of words.

"I guess I won't have to wait long neither," was the quick reply. "You fellows in them red stripes don't have much of a chance around here."

With that he left the cell, shaking his head in Bradshaw's direction.

Phil returned with the pail at once, and in passing No. 9999 signed to him that the message had been received, and the suggestion would be carried out.

Daring put in a hard day at the shops. He was continually weighing his chances. With two enemies that would do all in their power to harm him, he was greatly worried.

By quitting time that night he had worked himself around to a point where he would reach the washstand in the line in safety, when the attempt was made.

It would be hardly fair to the others. They counted on his help, and without it the thing might not succeed. Phil decided to give up all thought of making the attempt at escape.

He would think of his desertion and decide to stick it out.

Just before the lights were to be turned down for the night, Daring again concluded that the safest thing for him to do was to withdraw from the plot.

Acting on impulse, his decision he leaned out, caught the eye of No.

9999, and was about to telegraph his determination by eyes and mouth when a guard came hurriedly down the corridor with a handful of mail.

At Daring's cell, he stopped and handed in one letter.

The prisoner opened it eagerly and read:

Dear Phil:

I have got over my insane actions. Dr. Lyons has come to my aid and sent me to his private sanitarium, where I can have rest and will not be worried by Bob or my family.

The actress was frightful for a while, and I had almost decided to go as father wanted me to. But when it came to actually giving you up I could not do it.

I still have hope. My health is better, and I think we have a chance to win out. You know that—

At that point in his reading the lights were snapped out, and there was no chance for Phil to continue. He was near the end of "his note" from Alice and could imagine the remainder.

Daring lay back on his hard mattress and for the first time in many days felt really hopeful.

This sudden change in Alice buoyed him up. Now he was glad that he had decided to give up the attempt at escape. With her faith and hope he felt stronger and it would be foolish to run the risk of losing everything when he still had good friends outside who were working for his liberation.

So Daring went to sleep that night with a resolution to withdraw from the plot the first thing in the morning. It would be simple. He could sign to the little convict that he had changed his mind. Then he would rub off the last message without reading it and all would be safe.

Phil slept unusually well, and when the rising gong sounded sprang to his feet, fresh and in good condition.

His mind was active at once, and he stood close to the door, in order to be before Bradshaw when the locks were thrown open, so that he could secure the pail and destroy the message on the bar of soap that No. 9999 would pass to him.

As he stood waiting Phil suddenly realized that Bradshaw had jumped from his bunk and was pulling on his shoes.

Turning abruptly, Daring looked at his cellmate; there was determination in his eyes.

"What are you getting dressed for?" asked Phil. "You've got lots of time. I scrub out this morning."

"No, you scrub it's my day," answered the other, standing up beside Daring and trying to force him aside.

Phil had not figured on this. He feared that Bradshaw would be up, and the evidence over to the prison authorities.

"I'm going to scrub out today," answered Phil, firmly. "Don't try to push me or you'll get into trouble."

"Trouble? What?" asked the other, giving Daring a shove. "It's you that's going to get into trouble."

Phil's fists clenched, he turned to finish the argument, when, out of the tail of his eye, he caught sight of the bath trusty, approaching swiftly and silently.

"Stop that noise! What's it all about?" cried No. 771, taking his stand in front of their door.

There are 1762 of these

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